

- During the Crusades of the 12th century, a band of men – worn out by their battles over the Holy Land – decided to live the life of hermits on Mt. Carmel in northern Israel.
- There they lived separately in their own hermitages, but prayed together in a chapel they built and dedicated to Our Lady.
- Seeking to honor and devote themselves to Mary as their patroness, these men called themselves the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mt. Carmel.
- In the 13th century, though, Saracens overran the Holy Land, and the Carmelites (as they came to be known) had to flee Mt. Carmel and return to their home countries in Europe.
- As they returned home and set up new Carmelite communities, they found the 13th c. Europe into which they were settling a difficult place, having to compete for precious resources with the dozens of new religious communities springing up all around.
- Added to this hardship was a division in the Carmelite Order as to whether they should cling to their roots as hermits or adapt to a mendicant way of life like that taken up by their contemporaries: the Franciscans and Dominicans.
- In the midst of these difficult times for the Carmelites, Our Lady appeared to the Carmelite's prior general: St. Simon Stock, in Aylesford, England, on July 16, 1251.
- When she appeared to St. Simon Stock, Our Lady held out to him the brown scapular, and promised that whoever would wear the scapular devoutly throughout life would enjoy eternal salvation.
- Today, July 16th, is celebrated throughout the Church as the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.
- The scapular, which became a part of the Carmelite habit shortly after Our Lady's apparition to St. Simon, consists of a broad panel of cloth worn over the shoulders, covering both a person's front and back that you often see on monks and religious.
- Over the years the scapular was adapted for use by the laity, becoming two small panels of cloth joined by strings that is worn over the shoulders.
- Within 30 years of the apparition, the scapular had become so important to the Carmelites that it was prescribed that all Carmelite friars must wear the scapular at all times, even to bed, and failure to do so was considered a serious fault.
- This is because the scapular was originally understood by the Carmelites to be a symbol of their obedience to Christ. So taking off the scapular was akin to rebelling against Christ, of throwing off Christ's sweet yoke.
- Yet nearly 800 years later in our own day and time, we understand the brown scapular to be a sign of one's devotion to Our Lady rather than our Lord.
- This identification with Marian devotion and piety came in the centuries following the apparition, such that now the scapular is understood to be one of the most important and esteemed forms of Marian devotion.
- Yet to be yoked to Mary is to be yoked to Christ, but in an even sweeter and more efficacious way!
- Worn popularly as it is by so many, the scapular is a sacramental of the Church, which means it is a sacred sign that is a means for disposing one to receive and cooperate with God's graces and thereby draw closer to Him.

- It's not magical; it's not a good luck charm. It's a symbol that the faithful may wear that points to one's love for the Blessed Virgin Mary and one's desire to serve her, to please her, and to imitate her – which, ultimately, is pleasing to our Lord!
- In fact, the Church's writings on the brown scapular state that it is a Marian habit or garment that is both a sign and a pledge. The scapular is a *sign* of belonging to Mary, and it is a *pledge* of her motherly protection – in this life and in the next.
- To wear the brown scapular properly and to receive the benefits promised, it is necessary for one to be received into the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, which consists of a brief rite of prayer conducted by a priest.
- And for all who are interested, I will be offering this after all of our Masses today.
- The requirements for being enrolled are: that one wear the scapular faithfully, that one practice chastity according to one's state in life, and that one be willing to pray *The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary* daily or pray the Rosary daily.
- When one is received into the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, it means that one belongs to a religious family (the Carmelites) who are particularly devoted to Our Lady and particularly dear to Our Lady.
- The scapular is the sign that one is consecrated to Our Lady, which implies that one is devoted to and trusts in the maternal intercession of Mary's Immaculate Heart.
- Wearing the scapular is also a sign that one desires to imitate Our Lady's virtues by cultivating within oneself especially the virtues of humility, chastity, and charity.
- It is also piously believed by the Carmelites that anyone who dies wearing the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel will be saved from eternal damnation, and that Mary will intercede for him or her to be delivered from Purgatory.
- Of course, being received into the Confraternity and wearing the brown scapular is not a "Get Out of Jail Free" card. You have to strive to live a life of holiness and to devote yourself to Our Lady by trusting in her and imitating her. It's not for the faint of heart!
- Truly, practicing this particular devotion requires one to be attentive to the demands of the interior life through prayer. It requires that we come to resemble Mary in our hearts and souls, and not just outwardly by wearing her garment.
- Practicing the devotion of the brown scapular is an invitation to a life of recollection, of constant recourse to Mary and our Lord, of intimate union with Jesus and Mary, of becoming fully devoted to God through Mary.
- For those of us who have consecrated or are consecrating ourselves to Jesus through Mary through 33 days of preparation, the scapular is the perfect sign of our consecration promise.
- My dear brothers and sisters, we can never go wrong when we give ourselves to Mary. Being devoted to her always brings us closer to her Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Being devoted to Mary always aids us greatly on the path to salvation.
- If you'd like to make a commitment to living your life in union with Mary – to be like Mary – then I encourage you to be enrolled in the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and wear the brown scapular with devotion and love.
- Through the faithful wearing of the scapular and devoting ourselves to Our Lady, may we each come to resemble her, who is our life, our sweetness, and our hope.
- Through her gracious intercession, may we all be saved from the fires of hell and led quickly to Heaven after we die.
- Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, pray for us.